

CITY OF FAIRFIELD  
Birmingham Industrial District  
Seven miles W of Birmingham  
Fairfield  
Jefferson County  
Alabama

HAER No. AL-110

HAER  
ALA  
37-FAIRF,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

ADDENDUM TO  
CITY OF FAIRFIELD  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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ADDENDUM TO  
THE CITY OF FAIRFIELD

HAER  
ALA  
32-FAIRF,  
1-

HAER No. AL-110

**Location:** Extends from 40th to 52nd Streets and along Commerce, Gary, Parkway, DeBardleben, Carnegie and Ridgeway Avenues, seven miles west of the Birmingham city center, Fairfield, Jefferson County, Alabama (Approximately 240 acres). Fairfield is accessed by two exits from I 20-59.

**Present Owner:** Multiple private.

**Date of Construction:** 1909-1920s

**Builder/ Architect/  
Engineer:** George Miller, land planner

**Project Information:** This report is based upon written documentation donated by the Birmingham Historical Society, reformatted to HABS/HAER guidelines.

**Description:** The original city of Fairfield includes densely-developed residential areas along Parkway, DeBardleben, Ridgeway and Carnegie Avenues, a solidly-lined commercial district along Gary Avenue, a Civic Plaza and central park as well as many smaller parks. Residential types include single family bungalows, the dominant housing form, as well as Tudors and two-family duplex houses. Residences and churches are located about the central park. The former TCI Hospital, now Lloyd Noland, is located in Overlook Park on a high knoll above the city. The commercial district lies in the flat valley land, adjacent to the industrial plants of TCI-U. S. Steel-now USX.

**Significance:** Fairfield represents the ultimate expression of planned worker communities in the iron and steel industry. The design for this model industrial city reflects the influence of the "City Beautiful" movement of the Progressive Era in the history of the United States. Extensive, surviving planning documents detail goals of social engineering in their generous provision for civic and green spaces in the new city. While no expense was spared in the

planning and construction of streets, parks, sidewalks, residences and landscaping for this community, Fairfield housed only skilled white labor.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

### The Plan for Corey-Fairfield

In 1909, local developer Robert Jemison, Jr., hired George H. Miller of Boston to design a model city to attract workers to TCI-U.S. Steel's plants, scheduled to be constructed at a totally new site originally called Corey (for the U.S. Steel President) and later Fairfield. (Corey's involvement in a scandalous divorce led to changing the name to Fairfield, the Connecticut residence of another U.S. Steel official.) Miller was a nationally prominent city planner with extensive work in northern industrial town planning. Detailed design work was done from December 1909 through March 1910, with planning for parks and residential areas continuing through April 1911. Miller's schematics included a general plan, zoning scheme, plans for parks, cross sections of streets showing surface divisions, studies for street corners, studies for sewer, gas and water lines, possibilities for arrangement of lot space for typical bungalows and for residences of TCI officials, as well as plans for a hotel. Construction began in March 1910 and continued through April 1911. During this time, \$1,000,000 was expended on improvements.

Miller's town scheme demonstrated the cardinal principles of city planning: zoning of land for different purposes, inclusion of parks, regulation of the character of development on private land and design of a unified scheme that takes advantage of existing conditions. The physical land plan was grand and intricate: a rectilinear, fan-shaped and curvilinear system of streets, avenues and parks, closely fitted to existing roads and lay of the land. In level sections most conveniently accessible to the plants, business property, manufacturing concerns, small houses and apartments were suggested. The wooded, higher regions were devoted to fine residential sections. Existing vegetation was maintained. Miller's plan included proposals for additional landscaping and four separate park areas, one of which forms the Civic Plaza area, the dominant and formal axis of the community. Here Miller planned to locate major public and commercial buildings which he conceived as a unified group and designed in a homogeneous style. Zoning restrictions determined location, height and architectural style as well as types of business allowed.

Behind the Civic Plaza, the central park area was provided with recreational facilities, including athletic fields, tennis courts

and playgrounds. Homes and churches bordered the park. City planner Miller claimed, with pride, that 90 percent of all houses in Fairfield were less than a two-minute walk from a park or parkway.

Parkway, DeBardleben and Carnegie Avenues, the principal residential thoroughfares, led from the central park. For these and all streets, Miller prepared individualized landscaping designs to enhance the streets, buffer traffic and increase desirability of the property. To implement the designs, the land company provided a generous budget which included the planting of flowers and more than 100,000 trees and shrubs at a cost in excess of \$80,000, reportedly the largest such allocation for a southern real estate venture. Every lot in the proposed town was provided with a sanitary outlet, gas and water mains and electrical and telephone connections. More than 20 miles of streets were guttered, curbed and paved, setting new standards for southern residential construction. Quite literally, the town was built to order before its residents arrived.

The Fairfield Land Company, the local land development firm officered by Robert Jemison and associates, tried to set a standard for single-family residences through the example of the cottages they erected in 1910. All were single-family, detached houses set on 50-foot lots with large backyards. By about 1914, approximately 160 houses had been built on the 1,256 lots subdivided for residential development. The company also erected some of the early commercial buildings. Due to a slower than expected completion of U.S. Steel's plants adjacent to the model city, Fairfield's residential and commercial blocks did not fill out until after World War I. The 1920s and 1950s were additional prosperous times.

Jemison's plans for Fairfield's housing did not include residences for low income workers, who were largely immigrants and blacks. The American Steel and Wire Mill proposed to build several groups of "block houses" - two stories high with roof gardens and arranged about central courtyards - to accommodate workers at its plants. However, these were never built. In response to increased need for workers during World War I, TCI built Westfield, a model village providing homes, schools and playing fields for black employees. Fifty houses had been completed in Westfield by December 1917. TCI later constructed schools and churches along winding, tree-lined streets. The community lay one mile north of Fairfield, directly across from the plants and next to the slag dump. No structures remain at Westfield today, but the Westfield High School classes hold reunions in Birmingham and several Northern cities each year. Interurban Heights provided another residential area for black workmen at the various mills.

## CONDITION

. A recent city-sponsored restoration of the Civic Plaza restored remaining architectural features, replanted trees and shrubs according to the original plans and added rows of flags bordering the original brick walkways. The original fountain (converted to a planter) and bench still serve as the landmark center of town.

. The central park area behind the plaza now contains a large graded area for baseball and softball and a smaller field for sports by younger groups, both with concrete spectators' seats; three asphalt tennis courts; an asphalt basketball court; a fenced play area with modern play equipment; and a pavilion with a barbecue pit and picnic tables.

. Homes and churches appear to be in stable condition in the areas to the south of Gary Avenue. Construction of I 20/59 destroyed the northern edge of the residential district close to the USX plants and has undermined the desirability of remaining residences.

## DESCRIPTION CONTINUED

The Fairfield District includes the following:

Fairfield Business District (1909-1950s)  
Gary Avenue between 43rd Street and Valley Road

The district, lying due north of U.S. Steel-USX's Fairfield Works, includes significant buildings developed by the original development firm as well as many other firms and individuals, is probably the largest historic commercial district in the Birmingham area outside the Birmingham City Center.

Fairfield Residential Areas (1910s-1920s)  
Along Parkway, DeBardleben, Carnegie and Ridgeway Avenues and from 40th to 52nd Streets.

Fairfield City Hall (1945)  
4701 Gary Avenue

Fairfield Post Office (1936)  
420 45th Street

Christ Episcopal Church of Fairfield (1921-31)  
4912 Parkway

Fairfield Presbyterian Church (1926)  
4400 Parkway

First Baptist Church of Fairfield (1921)  
4816 Carnegie Avenue

Fairfield First United Methodist Church (1953)  
4411 Parkway

TCI-Employees (Lloyd Noland) Hospital (1919; wings 1965, 1973)  
Ridgeway Road

A landmark development of the Fairfield community is the TCI Employees (now Lloyd Noland) Hospital. In 1919, TCI constructed a 318-bed, four-story industrial hospital, one of the first of its kind in the nation, on a commanding 41-acre site along Flint Ridge, overlooking the mills. Though not sited here as part of the original plan, the hospital aligns with the axis of the city, which extends from the by-product plant up Crawford Street to the principal business section at Gary Avenue and on through the Plaza and park at the Civic Center to Flint Ridge. Birmingham historian George Cruikshank, writing in 1920, described the hospital as "the most magnificent of any of the institutions in the Birmingham district." Originally known as the Employees Hospital of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company, the hospital was renamed in 1950 to honor TCI medical director, Lloyd Noland. In August, 1951, TCI conveyed the hospital to the community, along with funds for expansion, and established a private foundation for its administration.

Flintridge-TCI-U.S. Steel-USX Building  
Flintridge Road on hill, overlooking plant of TCI-U.S. Steel-U.S.X.'s Fairfield works

In 1951 TCI moved its main headquarters from the Brown-Marx Building, in Birmingham's City Center, to this hilltop site on Flint Ridge overlooking the Fairfield Works. The Chicago architectural firm of Holabird, Root and Burgee designed the \$6 million facility for 1,300 employees.

The International style building made extensive use of stainless steel for both structural and decorative purposes. John W. Galbreath and Company, a Columbus, Ohio real estate and land management firm, financed construction of the office complex through the Flint Ridge Development Company, which leased the structure to U.S. Steel.

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